THE MESSAGE
OF
ISLAM

MUHAMMAD ZAFRULLAH KHAN

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In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful

Foreword

Widespread interest in Islam has recently been aroused in the West by events and developments taking place in some Muslim countries. This brief outline of the origin, spirit and teachings of Islam is designed to furnish Western readers with an authentic miniature which it is hoped might urge them to embark upon a deeper and more extended study of this great faith which has in the past suffered much at the hands of hostile Western critics and is today suffering even more at the hands of those who profess to be its followers and exponents.

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ISLAM – A UNIQUE RELIGION

Of the great world faiths, Islam is unique in several respects. It is the only one that does not rely on any myth or mystery. It is based upon the certainty of proved and acknowledged fact. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, peace be on him, was a historical figure, and lived his life in the full light of day. The revelation vouchsafed to him, over a period of twenty-two years, has been fully safeguarded, in the Holy Quran, according to the Divine promise set out in the Quran itself: *Surely, We Ourself have sent down this Exhortation, and We will, most surely, safeguard it* (15:10). This comprises several aspects:

First, the text of the revelation should have been preserved in its purity and entirety for all time. Considering that the revelation contained in the Quran was vouchsafed to the Prophet over a period of twenty-two years, first in Mecca, then in Medina; that this period was marked by persecution, disturbance, and fighting; that the Prophet himself was not literate; and that there was no sure method of preserving a record of the revelation except through human memory; it is a truly miraculous fact that the text of the Quran has been preserved intact, down to the last vowel point. Even Western scholars, who do not accept the Quran as Divine revelation, affirm that it is word for word that which Muhammad gave out to the world as Divine revelation.

Second, the language in which the revelation was sent should have continued to be in use as a living language. Classical Arabic, the language of the Quran, is today understood and used as a means of communication over much vaster areas of the earth and by many hundred times more people than was the case in the time of the Prophet.

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These two factors, so essential for the safeguarding of the guidance contained in the revelation, could not have been assured by the Prophet in advance.

Third, but more was needed. Life is dynamic, and the pattern of human life is subject to constant change. Besides, history testifies that the passage of time brings about a decline in spiritual and moral values. It was inevitable, therefore, that over the centuries there should have been a falling off in the true appreciation of Divine guidance set forth in Divine revelation, as applicable to current conditions and situations. The complete safeguarding of the Divine revelation thus necessitated a constant process of spiritual revival and rebirth. In the nature of things this must also come about through revelation. It was announced by the Prophet that to meet this need God would continue to raise from among the Muslims, at the beginning of each century, someone who would be inspired to revive the faith by drawing attention to the guidance contained in the Quran apposite to current conditions. History has confirmed the truth of this assurance conveyed by the Prophet.

A Living Message

The last century has, however, witnessed the onset of a tremendous revolution in human values in all spheres of life. Standards that had been accepted and subscribed to through centuries are undergoing rapid revision and modification. The very dimensions of human life are being reshaped, so that scholars and thinkers are beginning to stress the need of a new revelation. Yet, the Quran is quite clear that the guidance contained therein would prove adequate during all stages at all times.

What provision, it may be asked, is there in the Quran to meet the contingency with which mankind is faced today, and which is likely to grow evermore insistent during all the tomorrows that lie ahead? To meet this contingency the Quran announced that the Prophet had not only been raised in the generation among whom he lived, but would also be raised among others who had not yet joined them (62:3-4). This meant a spiritual second advent of the Prophet for the purpose of setting forth from the Quran guidance that may be needed in the new age, and for illustrating the values demanded by the exigencies with which man may then be faced. This promise has been fulfilled in the advent of Ahmad, of Qadian (1835–

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1908), who warned that mankind stood at the threshold of an era which would bear the same relation to his age, that is, the beginning of the twentieth century, as the beginning of that century bore to the days of Adam, and who proceeded to set forth from the Quran, in the light of revelation vouchsafed to him, the guidance that mankind now desperately needs.

Thus, Islam comprises within itself the means of its own revival, not merely through normal interpretation, but also through the light of revelation, vouchsafed by the Divine to God's elect through the ages. In this context, it needs to be remembered that the whole of the Quran from beginning to end is verbal revelation, and is thus literally the Word of God. As such, it possesses a dynamic quality and is many-faceted. It is as dynamic as the universe which is the work of God. This assures a complete accord, throughout, between the Quran and the universe. The Quran affirms that the universe is bound by law and thus bound is placed at the service of man. For instance, it is said:

> *God is He Who created the heavens and the earth and caused water to come down from the clouds and brought forth therewith fruit for your sustenance. He has subjected to you the ships that they may sail through the sea by His command, and the rivers too has He subjected to you. He has also subjected to you the sun and the moon, both pursuing their courses constantly. He has subjected to you the night as well as the day. He gave you all that you wanted of Him. If you try to count the favours of God, you will not be able to number them.* (14:33-35)

Again:

> *He has constrained into service for you the night and the day, and the sun and the moon; and the stars too have been constrained into your service by His command. Surely, in that are Signs for a people who make use of their reason. He has constrained into service for you the things He has created in the earth, of diverse hues. Surely, in that is a Sign for a people who take heed. He it is Who has subjected to you the sea, that you may take therefrom fresh flesh to eat, and the ornaments that you wear. Thou seest the ships ploughing it, that you may journey thereby, and that you may seek of His bounty, and that you may be grateful.* (16:13-15)

Reference to God's Signs emphasises the need for study and research so that the proper use of each thing may be discovered by acquiring knowledge of its properties and the laws governing

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them. The assurance that the whole universe is subjected to man's service, and the certainty that everything in it is governed by laws, the knowledge of which can be progressively acquired by man, throws wide open to man all avenues of knowledge which he is not only encouraged, but is repeatedly urged and exhorted, to explore unceasingly. The only limitation is imposed by another of God's laws:

> *That so long as man continues to make beneficent use of God's bounties, God will continue to multiply them unto man without limit, but if he misuses or abuses them, he will be called to account in respect of them, and these very bounties may become the instruments of his ruin and his destruction.* (14:8)

Universal Guidance

The Quran teaches that God has, at all stages, furnished guidance to mankind through revelation vouchsafed to the Prophets. It requires faith in all previous Prophets, so that all of them are believed in and revered by the Muslims. It teaches, however, that previous revelations were limited in their scope. Each was designed to meet the needs of the people to whom it was sent during the stage of development upon which that people was about to enter. Each contained fundamental truths, valid through the ages, in respect of the whole of mankind, but it also contained guidance, directions, commandments, and prohibitions which were of a local or temporary character. Moreover, in course of time, portions of those revelations were lost or forgotten or perverted. That which was of universal and permanent application in previous revelations, has been reaffirmed in the Quran. Such portions as had been lost or were overlooked or forgotten, but were still needed, have been revived. That which was of purely local or temporary application and was no longer needed has been omitted. That which was not contained in previous revelations, the need for it not having arisen, but which would henceforth be needed by mankind, has been added (2:107; 3:8).

Not only are today's versions of previous revelations open to serious question on the score of authenticity of the text and accuracy of translation and interpretation; many of the details concerning the commandments and ordinances and even doctrine which were of a temporary or local character, are now out of date or inapplicable. Today's doctrine is also in many

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cases based on subsequent interpretation and formulation, which appear to have little connection with what was contained in the revelation and even contradict it. Attention is drawn to all this in the Quran, and yet the Quran emphasises the unity of the fundamental teaching contained in all previous scriptures and insisted upon by all the Prophets, namely, belief in the Existence and Unity of God and in the hereafter, and conformity to God's will through righteous action. Thus the Quran, while affirming the truth of all previous Prophets, itself comprises all truth for the whole of mankind for all times. The Quran is thus a universal possession and inheritance; its message is directed to the whole of mankind (7:159). It is sent down as a guidance for mankind, with clear proofs of guidance and with discrimination between truth and falsehood (2:186).

It expounds and explains all that is or may be needed by mankind for the complete fulfilment of life (16:90). It seeks to create faith in God through rehearsal of God's Signs; it makes provision for mankind's welfare: material, moral, and spiritual; it teaches all that is needed for the beneficent regulation of human life and expounds the philosophy underlying it, so that reason being satisfied, wholehearted conformity to what is taught is assured (62:2-3). It expounds the necessity of establishing and maintaining communion with God. It draws attention to Divine attributes, their operation and the manner in which mankind may derive benefit from the knowledge thereof. In short, all that is basic for the promotion of human welfare in all spheres, whether pertaining to principle or conduct, is set forth and expounded (16:90).

It is not possible to set forth at any time the whole meaning and interpretation of the Quran or, indeed, of any portion of it, with finality. It yields new truths and fresh guidance in every age and at every level. It is a standing and perpetual miracle (18:110). The universe is dynamic and so is the Quran. Indeed, so dynamic is the Quran that it has always been found to keep ahead of the world and never to lag behind it. However fast the pace at which the pattern of human life may change and evolve, the Quran always yields, and will go on yielding, needed guidance in advance. This has now been demonstrated through fourteen centuries, and that is a guarantee that it will continue to be demonstrated through the ages.

The Quran has proclaimed that falsehood will never overtake it. All research into the past and every discovery and invention in the future will affirm its truth (41:43). The Quran speaks at

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every level; it seeks to reach every type of understanding, through parables, similitudes, arguments, reasoning, the observation and study of the phenomena of nature, and the natural, moral, and spiritual laws (18:55; 39:28; 59:22).

The Quran reasons from the physical and tangible to the spiritual and intangible. For instance: *Among His Signs is that thou seest the earth lying withered, but when We send down water on it, it stirs and swells with verdure. Surely, He Who quickens the earth can quicken the dead. Verily, He has power over all things* (41:40). Here, by quickening of the dead is meant the revival and rebirth of a people. As the dead earth is quickened by life-giving rain from heaven, a people that appears to be dead in all respects is revived and regenerated through spiritual water from heaven, that is to say, through Divine revelation. This idea is expounded in the Quran in several places. Both resurrection and renaissance are explained with reference to the phenomenon of the dead earth being revived through life-giving rain (22:6-8).

The Quran repeatedly urges observation and reflection, the exercise of reason and understanding (3:191-192; 22:270).

Whenever attention is drawn in the Quran to God's Signs, the object is to urge reflection upon the events or phenomenon cited, that we may proceed to draw lessons therefrom which would help us grasp the truth; to understand the operation of Divine attributes and of the Divine laws; to appreciate spiritual values and to adjust and order our lives accordingly, so that all our activities in all spheres should become wholly beneficent. It is in that sense that the guidance contained in the Quran is described as a healing and a mercy for those who put their faith in it (17:83). We are reminded:

> *O mankind, there has indeed come to you an Exhortation from your Lord and a healing for whatever ills there are in the hearts, and a guidance and a mercy for those who believe.* (10:58)

Freedom of Faith

With all this, man is left to his free choice and acceptance of the truth. Faith is not commanded on the basis of authority, but is invited on the basis of understanding (12:109). *This is a*

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Book that We have revealed to thee, full of blessings, that they may reflect over its verses, and that those gifted with understanding may take heed (38:30). There is complete freedom to believe or to deny, as is said: *There shall be no compulsion in religion, for guidance and error have been clearly distinguished* (2:257); and again: *Proclaim, O Prophet: It is the truth from your Lord; wherefore, let him who will, believe, and let him who will, disbelieve* (18:30). But of course, though the choice is free, the consequences of the choice will follow in accordance with Divine law. No one is forced. Everyone must choose and seek the purpose of his life on the basis of faith, or turn his back on the truth and destroy his soul, according to his choice.

It has sometimes been suggested that belief in Divine revelation, and acceptance of revealed truth, tend towards intellectual rigidity and narrowness. The exact reverse is the truth. Revelation stimulates the intellect and opens all manner of avenues for the research and expansion of knowledge. The constant and repeated exhortation to reflect upon and ponder every type of natural phenomenon, with which the Quran abounds, is an express urge in that direction. History furnishes incontrovertible proof of this. Within an astonishingly brief period following the revelation of the Quran, darkness and confusion were dispelled over vast areas of the earth, order was established, all manner of beneficent institutions sprang into life, a high moral order was set up, and the blessings of knowledge, learning, and science began to be widely diffused. Human intellect, which for some centuries had been almost frozen into inactivity, experienced a sudden release and upsurge, and the world experienced an astounding revolution, material, moral, and spiritual. This was no freak occurrence, no sudden flare-up followed by an even more sudden collapse. It was a phenomenon characterized by strength, beneficence, and endurance. It fulfilled to a pre-eminent degree the needs and yearnings of the human body, intellect, and soul. It changed the course of human history. It flung wide open the gates of knowledge and progress in all directions. Its impact continues to be felt today through many and diverse channels.

The Quran describes itself as a light and as a clear Book, whereby does Allah guide those who seek His pleasure along the paths of peace, and leads them out of every kind of darkness into the light by His will, and guides them along the right path (5:16-17).

On the other hand, the Quran itself discourages the tendency to seek regulation of everything by Divine command, pointing

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out that such a regulation would become restrictive and burdensome (5:102).

One of many characteristics of the Quran which marks it as the Word of God is that to arrive at the comprehension of its deeper meaning and significance, the seeker must, in addition to a certain degree of knowledge of the language and the principles of interpretation, cultivate purity of thought and action. The greater the purity of a person's life, the deeper and wider will be his comprehension of the meaning of the Quran (56:80).

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The Life of The Holy Prophet of Islam

This comprehensive message was conveyed in verbal revelation to the Holy Prophet of Islam over a period of approximately twenty-two years (610-632), and every aspect of it was illustrated by the Holy Prophet in his own life. He has been described in the Holy Quran as an excellent exemplar (33:22). Also, he was commanded to announce:

> *If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will then love you and forgive you your faults. Allah is Most Forgiving, Ever Merciful.* (3:32)

This necessitated that his life should be lived in the light of day and that a full account of it should become available. It was also necessary that his life should be multi-faceted, in the sense that he should be called upon to fill a diversity of roles, and that he should fill them to perfection. He was born in Mecca in AD 570 and lived through the first third of the seventh century. A full and detailed account of his life has come down to us and is open to study and research by seekers after truth. All this could not have been contrived by the Holy Prophet on his own. At every stage and every step of his life, the hand of God was clearly visible as Protector, Guide and Helper.

He was born an orphan, his father having died a few months before his birth. His mother died when he was about six years old, and his grandfather, who was his loving and devoted guardian, died when he was eight years old. He then passed into the care of his uncle, Abu Talib, brother of his father. Even at this early stage the Divine design is retrospectively perceptible that God Himself was his true Guardian. This is

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confirmed beyond question or cavil by the fact that though his childhood, boyhood and youth had been spent in the corrupt and debased society of Mecca, he arrived at his full maturity without the least suspicion of the slightest stain on his character. In after years, he was wont to say that before he received the Divine Call, he had little understanding of moral and spiritual values, yet Divine wisdom fully safeguarded him against every kind of lapse. He never paid homage to an idol, never ate of anything presented as offering to an idol, never touched liquor, nor gambled, nor took part in any of the frivolous activities of his fellow youths.

At one period of his youth, Muhammad was employed, like other young men of his age, in tending the sheep and goats of Mecca upon the neighbouring hills and valleys. On one occasion, when he was engaged in his duty in company with a lad of Quraish, he asked him to look after his flock also, so that he could go into Mecca and divert himself there as other youths were wont to divert themselves at night. But no sooner had he reached the precincts of the city than a marriage feast engaged his attention, and he soon fell asleep. On another similar occasion, he again fell asleep on his way to the city till morning. Thus he escaped temptation and no more sought after such diversions. All the authorities agree in ascribing to the youth of Muhammad a modesty of deportment and purity of manners rare among the people of Mecca. It was quite in keeping with his character that he should have shrunk from the coarse and licentious practices of his youthful compatriots. Endowed with a refined mind and delicate taste, reserved and meditative, he lived much within himself, and the ponderings of his heart supplied occupation for leisure hours spent by others of a lower stamp in rude sports and profligacy. The fair character and honourable bearing of the unobtrusive youth won the approbation of his fellow citizens; and by common consent, he received the title *Al Ameen*, meaning The Faithful. After the Divine Call came to him, and his message was treated with ridicule and suspicion, he was urged by God to challenge his opponents in the words: *I have spent a whole lifetime among you before this; will you not then understand?* (10:17) Not his bitterest enemy could point to a single incident in his previous life to which exception could have been taken.

When he arrived at the age of maturity, his uncle recommended him to Khadija, a wealthy, highly respected widow among Quraish, who, like most of her contemporaries, had a substantial interest in the trade caravans that travelled from

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Mecca to Yemen in the south, and to Syria in the north, so that she might employ him as her agent in a caravan that was about to set out for Syria. She readily agreed, and Muhammad acquitted himself so well in the discharge of his duties that she was deeply impressed by his honesty, integrity, business acumen and his pleasing and attractive personality. She had been twice married and had children from both marriages. Though approaching her fortieth year, she had, after the death of her second husband, received a number of proposals of marriage, which she had turned down. Now she made up her mind to sound Muhammad, whether he would be willing to consider a proposal of marriage. She sent one of her maids to him on this errand. Muhammad was surprised and took counsel with his uncle, who expressed himself favourable and the match was arranged. Muhammad was twenty-five years of age and thus fifteen years Khadija's junior. The marriage, despite the disparity in age and affluence, proved a very happy one. Khadija bore Muhammad several children; of these, the sons died in infancy, but the daughters grew to womanhood and in due course married. The descendants of only one daughter, Fatima, who was married to the Prophet's cousin, Ali, son of his uncle, Abu Talib, have survived. All those who today claim direct descent from the Holy Prophet are descended through Fatima and her two sons, Hasan and Husain.

Muhammad was a loving and affectionate husband, showing tender regard and consideration for Khadija. When at home, he occupied himself in helping with the household tasks and taking care of his wife and children. He persuaded Khadija to give away the greater part of her wealth in charity to help the poor and the needy. It speaks highly of her character that she voluntarily agreed to a life of simplicity and benevolence in the company of her husband. She was so devoted to him and had come to admire him so deeply that when, fifteen years after their marriage, he received the Divine Call, she responded to it immediately, and was a constant source of comfort and support to him throughout the remaining ten years of their life together.

As time passed, Muhammad spent more and more time in contemplation and meditation. He possessed a sensitive mind and a grave and serene disposition. He felt keenly the distress of every fellow being, and reacted very sharply to it, affording such relief and assistance as were within his power. On one occasion, he observed an old slave labouring hard to fulfil his

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task of drawing water in a heavy bucket for tending his master's garden. Muhammad went to his assistance and drew up a quantity of water, which gave relief to the old man for a short while, so that he could rest and husband his failing strength. Muhammad spoke cheering and comforting words to him, and on parting from him, said kindly: Whenever you feel you are in need of help, you may call on Muhammad. Many such incidents are on record.

That which affected his mind most deeply and painfully, however, was the moral and spiritual decline into which his people had fallen, and from which he could see no way of rescuing them, save through Divine guidance and help. For the purpose of communing with himself and imploring the light and guidance of the Supreme Being concerning the problems that troubled his mind and soul, he formed the habit of retiring, for several days at a time, to one of the hills a few miles out of Mecca. There he occupied himself in prayer and contemplation. Taking with him a modest supply of dates and water, he would spend his days and nights in self-examination, in reflecting on the problems that troubled him, and in prayer and supplication to God. There is no record of the struggle that went on in his soul during this period of retreat. In the nature of things, it is not granted to any of us to probe into the depths of another's soul, to appraise accurately and completely its travail and its ecstasies. This is a holy secret between each individual and his Maker. Those years were, however, years of preparation, when Muhammad's soul was being deepened and proved and made ready for the heavy responsibility that the Divine will had decreed should be placed on him.

Concerning Moses, it is said in the Quran:

> *I wrapped thee with love from Me, and this I did that thou mightst be reared before My eye . . . We proved thee in various ways . . . then thou camest up to the standard, O Moses, and I chose thee for Myself.* (20:40-42)

As with Moses, so with Muhammad. He is reminded of this in the Quran:

> *Did He not find thee an orphan and take thee under His protection? Did He not find thee perplexed in search of Him and guide thee unto Himself? Did He not find thee in want and provide thee with abundance?* (93:7-9)

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Muhammad was forty years old when the Divine Call came to him in his retreat in Hira, to which he was in the habit of repairing for prayer and contemplation. He beheld a gracious Presence, who asked him to recite. Muhammad answered that he knew not how to recite. The Presence insisted: *Recite in the name of thy Lord Who created: created man from a clot of blood. Recite! Thy Lord is the Most Beneficent, Who taught man by the pen, taught him what he knew not* (96:2-6). Muhammad repeated the words as commanded. The Presence then vanished. Overpowered by the experience Muhammad immediately made his way home, all atremble. He told Khadija what had happened, and expressed fearful apprehension whether a frail human being like himself would prove equal to the heavy responsibility that the incident portended God was about to lay upon him.

'Surely, God will not suffer thee to fail,' was Khadija's comforting response. 'Thou art kind and considerate towards thy kin. Thou helpest the poor and forlorn and bearest their burdens. Thou strivest to restore the high moral qualities that thy people have lost. Thou honourest the guest and goest to the assistance of those in distress.'

At Khadija's suggestion, Muhammad accompanied her to her aged cousin, Waraqa, who was a Christian hermit, and related the experience to him. Waraqa assured him, 'The Angel that descended on Moses hath desended on thee. I wish I would be alive to give thee my support when thy people turn thee out.' 'Will they turn me out?' Muhammad exclaimed in surprise.' 'Never has that come to any which has come to thee,' Waraqa replied, 'but that his people have turned against him.'

Possibly Waraqa's reference to Moses was prompted by the prophecy:

> I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee, and I will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which he shall speak in My name, I will require it of him. (Deut. 18:18-19)

It is striking that the very first revelation that came to the Prophet commanded him: *Recite in the name of thy Lord.* Also, every chapter of the Quran opens with: *In the name of God, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful.*

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For a while there was no further experience of the same kind; but after an interval the Prophet began to receive revelation at brief intervals. He has described the experience vividly in these words: Revelation comes to me in different ways. Sometimes the words strike directly at my heart, like the ringing of a bell, this is physically hard on me. Sometimes I hear the words as if spoken from behind a veil. At other times I see a Presence that speaks the words to me. This is confirmed by the Quran (42:52-53).

Four persons believed in the Prophet from the very outset: his wife, Khadija; his young cousin, Ali, son of his uncle, Abu Talib, a lad only eleven years of age; his freedman, Zaid; and his closest friend, Abu Bakr. These four joined the Prophet and undertook to help him spread the Divine Light. When this became known to the Meccans, they laughed in derision. But they did not laugh long. Verse by verse, the revelation proceeded, until some wondered, and one by one began to be drawn to it. Soon mockery gave way to active concern. The Meccans began to feel that the message Muhammad proclaimed, of the Oneness of God, threatened their whole way of life and their very means of subsistence. If the worship of idols were abandoned, they reasoned, Mecca would cease to be a resort for pilgrims, and lose its position as a leading town, and would see its main industry wither. Even the trade caravans might be diverted from Mecca. It was, therefore, resolved to suppress this threat to their established way of life and to their prosperity.

The new doctrine made a strong appeal to the weak and the oppressed. The slaves, who suffered extreme hardship and indignity, began to hope that the Prophet's message might bring deliverance to them. Women, who were in some respects esteemed lower than animals, began to look up, and felt that the time was nigh when they might gain a position of dignity and honour beside their fathers, husbands, and sons. Young men were inspired with visions of a noble and dignified existence. The early converts came from the ranks of such as these. As the little band grew in number, the Meccans embarked upon a course of persecution which grew more cruel and savage as time passed, but their efforts failed to arrest the progress of the new doctrine of the Unity of God, the dignity and equality of man, and the lofty and noble goal of human existence.

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Opposition and Persecution

Quraish, becoming more and more apprehensive of the inroads being made by the new doctrine, sent a delegation to Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle, to whom they explained that though his nephew's denunciation of idol worship was intolerable to them, they had so far refrained from taking any extreme measure against him out of respect for Abu Talib. Would he not persuade his nephew to give up preaching the new doctrine, perhaps on pain of being disowned? They made it plain that if Abu Talib did not adopt this course, they would be compelled to disown him.

Abu Talib spoke to his nephew, conveying to him what the delegation had said, but he replied firmly that while he lamented his uncle's dilemma, he was under Divine orders which he could not disobey. Do not give up your people, uncle, said Muhammad; I do not ask you to stand by me. You may disown me as they have suggested. As for me, the One and Only God is my Witness when I say that if they were to place the sun on my right and the moon on my left, I would not desist from preaching the truth that God commands. I must go on doing so until the end.

Abu Talib plunged into deep thought. He was not ready to declare his faith in the Prophet's message, but he was very fond of him and must have felt a surge of pride at his firm and noble resolve to carry out his mission as commanded by God. Finally, he raised his head, and said: Son of my brother, go thy way; do thy duty as thou seest it; my people may disown me, but I shall stand by thee.

The tempo of persecution continued to mount and the Prophet advised those of his followers who could do so to leave Mecca and migrate across the Red Sea to Abyssinia, where they would find conditions more bearable under the rule of the Christian Emperor. A small band under the leadership of a cousin of the Prophet departed for Abyssinia. A delegation of Quraish followed them, demanding of the Emperor that the fugitives be delivered to them. The Emperor heard both sides and rejected the demand of the Meccans.

About this time, the persecuted and harassed Muslims of Mecca received some support and encouragement from the adherence of Umar, and Hamza, uncle of the Prophet, to Islam. But these conversions did not bring about any change in the attitude of the Meccans. Umar was treated in the same manner as the rest of the Muslims. Indeed, the persecution

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grew more bitter and intense. Aiming to starve them out, a complete boycott of the Muslims together with all members of the Prophet's family was instituted. They were blockaded within a narrow defile belonging to Abu Talib. All contact with them for any purpose whatever was forbidden. This imposed great hardship particularly on children and old people. This terrible situation continued for nearly three years, when some leading Meccans reacted against the savagery and inhumanity of their fellow citizens, and let it be known that they would invite the Prophet and his companions to come out of their place of confinement and go about their business as before. Thus was the blockade lifted. But the privation and hardship endured during the blockade had gravely affected the health of both Khadija and Abu Talib. Khadija died within a few days, and Abu Talib's end came a month thereafter. The death of his faithful and beloved wife left the Prophet bereft of his principal source of earthly comfort and consolation, and the death of his uncle exposed him to greater ill-treatment and persecution. In dozens of ways, his opponents made it almost impossible for him to leave his house to carry his message to any section of the people of Mecca or to those who might be on a visit there. In this situation, the Prophet decided to carry his message to Taif, a town about sixty miles south-east of Mecca, which was also a resort of pilgrimage and was more pleasantly situated than Mecca itself. On his journey to Taif, he was accompanied by Zaid, his freedman.

In Taif, the leading townsmen received the Prophet and let him have his say freely, but paid little heed to his message. After a while, they began to show signs of apprehension lest his presence in Taif might embroil them with the Meccans, with whom they had trade relations, and whose friendship they valued. So they left him to be dealt with by street urchins and the riff-raff of the town. The Prophet and his companion were finally turned out by mocking and jeering crowds who pelted them with stones. Both were wounded and bleeding as they left Taif behind them. The Prophet was now in a very difficult situation. He had left Mecca and he had been rejected by Taif. Under Meccan custom, he could not go back there unless his re-entry was sponsored by some leading Meccan. There was nowhere else to go. He prayed earnestly for light, guidance, and help, and then set out with Zaid on the return journey to Mecca. He stopped on the way at Nakhla, and sent word to Mut'am bin Adi, a leading Meccan, asking whether he would sponsor his re-entry into Mecca. Mut'am agreed, and

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the Prophet and Zaid thus returned to Mecca. But the situation in Mecca was as hostile and difficult as it had been when he had left it. His prayers and the revelation that came to him steadily, containing assurances of Divine help and final triumph, were his only source of consolation and strength. The latest revelations began to hint at the necessity for him to leave Mecca. It was the town of his birth, where he had spent the whole of his life, had married, where his children had been born, and where the Divine Call had come to him. Despite the bitter and cruel persecution that he and his followers continued to suffer, its people were dear to him and he knew that the parting, whenever it came, would be hard for him to bear. But his life was completely dedicated to his mission and he was ready to carry out in good spirit whatever might be God's pleasure concerning him. The painful prospect of having to leave Mecca was, however, softened by the Divine assurance that God would surely bring him back to it (28:86).

Invitation from Medina

In the eyes of the worldly, the Prophet had arrived at a dead end. The chances of his success and of the acceptance of his message were nil. But he was steadfast, and was confident that God would open a way. It had been his custom to make contact with parties from other parts of the country who visited Mecca on the occasion of the annual pilgrimage, and to try to interest them in his mission and message. On one such occasion, he met a party of six pilgrims from Medina, then known as Yathrib, who were encamped in a valley outside Mecca. At that time, Medina was inhabited by two Arab and three principal Jewish tribes. The Arab tribes, Aus and Khazraj, were pagan idol worshippers, but had to some degree become familiar with the Jewish traditions. They had heard from their Jewish fellow townsmen that they were expecting the advent of a Prophet which had been foretold in their scriptures (Deut. 18:18).

The men whom the Prophet encountered on this occasion belonged to the Khazraj tribe. When he told them that God had appointed him His Messenger, and had charged him with a message for mankind, they gave him a ready and eager hearing. They were convinced of his truth and declared their faith in him and in his message, agreeing to convey it to their fellow townsmen upon their return to Medina.

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The next year, twelve of them, representing both Aus and Khazraj, who were persuaded of the truth of the Prophet, came on pilgrimage and had a secret meeting with him in which they formally pledged their allegiance to him. They also requested him to send someone to Medina who might instruct them in the doctrine and teachings of Islam and help them to carry the Prophet's message to their brethren. The Prophet chose Mus'ab bin Umair for this purpose and despatched him to Medina.

When the season of the pilgrimage came round again, a large and representative delegation from Medina, seventy men and two women, met the Prophet and assured him that not only were their people in Medina ready to receive and give shelter to their brethren in faith from Mecca, but that they were eager and would be greatly honoured to receive the Prophet himself if he decided to go to Medina. On this occasion, the Prophet was accompanied by his uncle, Abbas, who, though he had not yet accepted Islam, was fond of the Prophet and was anxious for his safety. He warned the Medina delegation that they were undertaking a heavy responsibility in inviting the Prophet to Medina. The leader of the delegation replied that they had carefully considered all the implications involved in their invitation, and they would guard the Prophet with their lives. The Prophet decided that the Muslims of Mecca would migrate to Medina, and that for himself he would await God's command.

The Migration

Under the Prophet's direction, the Muslims in Mecca began to proceed to Medina quietly and without creating any stir. After a short period, the only adult male Muslims left in Mecca, besides the Prophet, were Abu Bakr and Ali, and a handful of slaves, who had no choice in the matter. Quraish took alarm that the Prophet might soon move beyond their reach, and they resolved to put a violent end to him on a particular night. At this point, the Prophet received God's command to leave Mecca, and he did so in company with Abu Bakr. When it was discovered that the Prophet had left Mecca, Quraish organised a party to pursue him and Abu Bakr. Guided by a tracker, the party arrived outside the cave in which the two fugitives had taken shelter. The tracker assured

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them that the fugitives had not gone any further. He was ridiculed, as there was nowhere for anyone to go except inside the cave, and this possibility they ruled out. Who would take the risk of serious bodily harm, and possibly death, from the vipers and reptiles that abounded inside and around the cave? Abu Bakr heard the voices of Quraish in altercation and was much afraid that if their hiding place was discovered serious harm might befall the Prophet. When he mentioned his fear, the Prophet replied: Have no fear. We are not only two, there is a third with us, even God (9:40). The pursuers returned to Mecca foiled in their immediate objective, but firm in their purpose. They announced that anyone who brought back the Prophet, alive or dead, would receive a reward of one hundred camels. This was widely proclaimed in all directions.

The Prophet and Abu Bakr spent two nights in the cave and on the third left for Medina accompanied by a trusted servant of Abu Bakr and a guide. Ten days after leaving Mecca, the party arrived within sight of Medina and were joyfully welcomed by the Muslims from Medina and those from Mecca who had preceded them. The Prophet decided to stop for a few days in Quba, a suburb of Medina, and then proceed to Medina. On arrival in Medina, his first act was to purchase the site where his camel had stopped, for the purpose of building a mosque thereon. He then accepted the offer of a Muslim whose house was nearest to the selected site to put him up temporarily, while the mosque and his own quarters next to it were being built.

With the arrival of the Prophet in Medina, Islam began to spread rapidly among the two Arab tribes of the town. But, as often happens in a mass movement, not all who declared their adherence to the faith were inspired by sincerity and high ideals. It was, however, generally felt that the Prophet was the most appropriate person, in the conditions and circumstances of Medina, to take on the responsibility of administering the affairs of Medina. Under his direction, a covenant was drawn up which was subscribed to both by Arabs and Jews. A common citizenship of Medina was established and conditions were prescribed for the regulation of the affairs of the town as well as for organising its internal order and external security. It was agreed that the internal affairs of each section would be regulated according to its laws and customs, but that if the security of Medina was threatened from outside, all sections would co-operate with each other in its defence. No section would enter into any separate treaty relations with any outside tribe,

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nor would any section be compelled to join in any fighting that might take place outside Medina. The final determination of disputes would be referred to the Prophet and his decision would be accepted and carried out.

Thus, the already heavy responsibilities of the Prophet were augmented by the problems related to the administration of the affairs of Medina. Abdullah bin Ubayy, Chief of Khazraj, was deeply chagrined at the loss of a crown, which, before the arrival of the Prophet, he had thought was assured for him. He became the leader of the disaffected party in Medina who became known as the hypocrites. The Jews on their part were not well disposed towards the Prophet. They were, it is true, awaiting the advent of a Prophet foretold in their scriptures (Deut. 18:18), but they felt that to accept an Arab as the fulfilment of that Prophecy would raise the prestige of the Arabs above that of the Jews in the religious and spiritual spheres and this, as Jehovah's chosen people, they were not prepared to tolerate. While not daring to oppose the Prophet openly, they let no opportunity pass of intriguing and conspiring against him and the Muslims both inside Medina and outside. To the internal problems of Medina and the dangers and hazards confronting the Muslims, and most of all the Prophet himself, a formidable threat was soon added from Mecca.

When the Meccans learnt that the Prophet had arrived safely at Medina, they resolved to adopt coercive measures to secure his expulsion from Medina. They addressed a letter to Abdullah bin Ubayy, warning him and the people of Medina that if they did not expel Muhammad from the city, or, failing that, did not take up arms against him and the Muslims, jointly with the Meccans, the Meccans would invade Medina with a mighty force and put to the sword all its male adults and enslave all its women. On receipt of this ultimatum, Abdullah held a secret council of his supporters and proposed that, in view of the Meccan threat, the only course open to them was to force the Prophet and his followers to leave Medina. When news of this reached the Prophet, he went to Abdullah and tried to dissuade him from embarking on such a course, pointing out that any such adventure could lead only to his own ruin. For the time being, Abdullah forbore, but he never abandoned the hope that an opportunity might arise when he could take measures to rid Medina of the Prophet and the Muslims, and secure his own recognition as the chief and ruler of Medina. Thus the stage was set for open warfare between the Meccans and the Muslims in Medina.

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All the great qualities of the Holy Prophet were now challenged and came into play. Though God's promise of succour for, and ultimate triumph of, Islam was wholly true and completely to be depended upon, God required that every effort be put forth in support of the cause. Therein lies the secret of the strength of Islam as a faith. The fullest confidence in, and reliance upon, God's grace and help, and the putting forth of the utmost effort that man is capable of, both these in combination, as taught by God Himself, help to achieve the goal. All success in every beneficent endeavour comes from God, but it follows upon sincere and steadfast effort combined with perfect trust and humble supplication to God.

The Battle of Badr

Space would not permit of even the briefest reference to all the precautions that the Holy Prophet took, and all the measures that he adopted, for the building up of the Muslim community, for the security of Medina, and for the ultimate triumph of the faith. By way of illustration, however, a brief account might be set out of the first battle fought out in Islam. About a year after the Emigration, intelligence began to reach the Prophet that the Meccans were preparing a strong force to advance upon Medina. Their pretext was that one of their large caravans returning from Syria was likely to be attacked by the Muslims at a point near Medina, and that an adequate force had to proceed north to secure its safe passage. They may have been genuinely apprehensive concerning the caravan, in view of their declared objective of putting an end to the Prophet and the Muslims by use of force. It was a large caravan, carrying valuable merchandise and was accompanied by a sizeable armed guard. By the time the Meccan army set out on its march north, however, news arrived that the caravan had passed safely through the danger zone. Nevertheless, the Meccan army continued its march in the direction of Medina.

On the side of the Muslims, permission to take up arms in defence having been accorded in Divine revelation (22:40-42), the Prophet assembled a force of just over three hundred Muslims from Mecca and Medina, and marched out with them. This heterogeneous body–it scarcely deserved the designation 'force'–was united only by the common bond of faith and the determination to die in defence of it. It included some of the older Meccan Muslims who were good fighters, but the

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greater number were young men who had had little, if any, combat experience. Their devotion to the faith and their zeal in its support were their only qualifications. Ill-armed, in poor physical condition, with but two horses, and a few camels, they presented a pitiful contrast to the Meccan army, which consisted of a thousand tried warriors, well-armed, and well-mounted.

After a march of three days, the Muslims arrived at Badr and took up their position near a well. The ground underfoot was sandy and the few experienced fighters in the group were apprehensive that this would be a serious handicap during battle, as the sand would not permit easy and rapid movement. The Meccan army on its arrival took up a position opposite on firm clay soil.

Night set in. The Prophet spent the greater part of it in earnest prayer and supplication. He had firm faith in every Divine promise, but he also realised fully the complete supremacy of the Divine Being and the many weaknesses that beset mortals. He prayed for success; he prayed for strength; he prayed for steadfastness for himself and those with him. Part of his prayer during that fateful night has come down to us. It reveals the core of his anxiety: Lord, if Thou wilt suffer this little band to perish, Thy Holy Name will no more be glorified on earth and there will be none left to worship Thy Majesty in true sincerity.

The morning approached. There had been a shower of rain which firmed the sand underfoot while turning the clay into slippery mud, and the Muslims were comforted and encouraged. They beheld, in hope and fear, the dawn of the day which was to decide the issue of the most fateful contest ever waged in the history of man between the forces of truth and righteousness, and those of falsehood and ignorance. The Prophet drew up his men in battle array and, leaving them with his instructions, retired again to supplicate the Divine. He was prostrate before his Lord in agony when the general fighting began. Abu Bakr approached him and put a gentle hand on his shoulder, saying: Messenger of Allah, thou hast prayed enough. The Prophet raised himself and announced that God had just given him to understand that the time had arrived for the fulfilment of the prophecy revealed sometime earlier at Mecca: *The hosts shall be routed and will turn their backs in flight. Aye, the Hour is their appointed time; and the Hour will be most calamitous and most bitter* (54:46-47).

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The Muslims had their backs to the rising sun, while it shone in the faces of Quraish. For a short while the advantage appeared to be with Quraish on account of the superiority of their numbers and equipment. The Holy Prophet took up a handful of gravel and sand and threw it in the direction of the enemy. Immediately a fierce gust of wind began to blow gravel and sand into the faces of Quraish, which almost blinded them, and made their movements erratic and ineffective. The issue now was no longer in doubt. The flower of the chivalry of Quraish was soon left upon the field, dead and dying. Seventy, all leading men of Quraish, including Abu Jahl, were killed and an equal number taken prisoner, including the Prophet's uncle, Abbas, and one of his sons-in-law. Of the Muslims, fourteen, six Emigrants and eight Ansar, became martyrs and no one was taken prisoner. The Prophet, while giving thanks to God for the great deliverance which He had vouchsafed, was deeply grieved that so many of Quraish had perished in pursuit of their vain purpose.

There was much debate as to the fate of the prisoners. According to Arab custom, they could have been despatched immediately; but the Prophet determined that those who could offer suitable ransom would be released on payment of ransom, and those who could not offer ransom would be released as an act of grace. The ransom of such of the prisoners as were literate was fixed at teaching ten Muslim boys to read and write.

When news of the catastrophe reached Mecca, there was mourning in every house. But all customary lamentations and other expressions and exhibitions of grief were forbidden by the Elders till Quraish had had time to reorganise their forces and to avenge the disastrous defeat. The profits gained by the caravan that had arrived safely in Mecca were not distributed, but were reserved for the purpose of equipping another force against the Muslims.

There is no other instance in human history of such a clear and decisive Divine Sign in support of truth against falsehood. The grave disparity in all respects between the opposing forces predicated the certain and utter ruin of the weaker side. Except for the succour and grace of God, there can be no feasible explanation of the disaster that overtook Quraish. The unequal struggle would continue for another four years, but there is no doubt that the spine of the vaunted might of Quraish was effectively broken in the field of Badr.

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Opposition Continues

A year later, at Uhud, the disparity in numbers and equipment was even more striking than at Badr, yet in the beginning of the battle the Muslims put the enemy to flight; but owing to a grave default on the part of a small group, the triumph was converted into near disaster for the Muslims. Even so, Quraish failed to take advantage of the situation which had placed Medina at their mercy and returned to Mecca without the achievement of their ultimate purpose.

Viewing with grave alarm the increasing strength of the Prophet and the Muslims, and the slow but steady progress of Islam, Quraish now had recourse to calling in aid the large number of tribes whom their hostile propaganda had converted into bitter enemies of Islam. A mighty host, numbering between eighteen and twenty thousand, now advanced against Medina with the determined purpose of putting an end, finally, to what they conceived to be a grave threat to their way of life and to all that which had value in their eyes. On arrival near Medina they discovered that their advance on the city was barred by a wide trench, which was manned by the Muslims at various places on its inner side. Chagrined, but not discouraged, they laid siege to Medina. The siege continued for nearly three weeks and imposed unendurable suffering and hardship upon the inhabitants of the city. There was little fighting, except whenever a party of Quraish made an attempt to cross the trench. Each such attempt was gallantly foiled by the Muslims. Yet the Muslims were reduced to such a state of weakness and helplessness, that from the purely human point of view, they could not imagine that any chance of their deliverance might still be available. To add to the anxiety and concern of the Holy Prophet, he received intimation that the only remaining Jewish tribe in Medina had yielded to the solicitations of Quraish and had agreed to attack the Muslims in the rear while the confederate army mounted a joint attack all along the trench in front. The Muslims would thus be crushed between the upper millstone of the confederate forces and the nether millstone of Banu Quraidhah, the Jewish tribe, who had treacherously, contrary to their covenant, gone over to the enemy. The situation was one of utter hopelessness and despair for the Muslims, but for their firm faith in God and His promise of security. About the middle of the night, a fierce storm began to blow, which threw the entire camp of the confederates into utter confusion. They were so terrified that they felt that there was no security for them except in flight. By

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the break of dawn, not one of them was left within visible distance of the trench. This was the end of the armed aggression of Quraish against the Muslims. These were, however, only the highlights of the struggle which had throughout the years continued to erupt in every shape and form, including treachery, deceit and ambush. All such attempts were frustrated by the foresight and wisdom of the Holy Prophet who spared no effort in safeguarding the security of those who had been entrusted into his care. Yet that was not his only, or even his main, purpose. This type of struggle was not of his seeking, but had been forced upon him against his will. Through all this, he continued to pursue his main purpose which was the propagation of the Unity of the Divine and the training of his people in the beneficent values of Islam which pervade every aspect of human life.

In the sixth year after his Emigration from Mecca to Medina, a truce was arranged with Quraish at Hudaibiyya, for a period of ten years, the terms of which, even in the eyes of the Muslims, were utterly unequal and were even humiliating for them. But the Holy Prophet knew better and it soon became clear that the truce had opened wide avenues for the spread and progress of Islam. Within less than two years, Quraish committed a glaring breach of the terms of the truce, by a party of them attacking and ravaging a tribe in alliance with the Muslims. On the entreaty of the oppressed tribe, the Holy Prophet marched against Mecca at the head of ten thousand devoted Muslims. Quraish realised that no way of deliverance was left to them. They threw themselves upon the mercy of the Holy Prophet.

All the scorn and ridicule poured on him by the Meccans in his early years; their implacable hatred and enmity; the long years of bitter, cruel, and sustained persecution; all the fighting, the hardship and suffering; the loss of dear and devoted Companions–all, all was in the moment of triumph laid aside, banished from the mind and forgiven in the name of the Lord on High, the Gracious, the Merciful, the Creator and Master of all. The gates of love and mercy were opened wide. Bitter enemies of the morning became warm friends by midday. Some hearts were still sullen; the humiliation, though softened by magnanimity, was hard to endure, but even these could not long withstand the healing effect of the balm so generously and so beneficently applied by the Prophet. History furnishes no parallel instance of such complete forgiveness, such utter beneficence, on so large a scale.

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Mecca had fallen, but this did not bring peace. Within less than a month, while the Prophet was still in Mecca, he had to go forth to face a huge army of hostile tribes at Hunain. The battle, even before it was fairly joined, took an adverse course, and the Muslim forces were thrown into utter confusion. They were, however, soon rallied and the fighting that ensued ended in complete victory for them. A very large number of prisoners was taken and enormous booty fell into the hands of the Muslims. Eventually, the prisoners were all freed without ransom and out of the spoils munificent largesses were bestowed upon the Meccans, some of whom had not even embraced Islam.

Taif still stood out, and though the Jewish stronghold at Khaibar which had long been the centre of intrigue against the Muslims had been subdued earlier, danger still threatened from the north. There were persistent rumours, subsequently discovered as originating in malice, that a large force was gathering on the border of Syria with hostile intent. In the face of great difficulties, the Prophet assembled a force and marched to the border of Syria. Arrived there, he despatched parties in different directions to report on the situation. These returned and reported that they had not observed any concentrations anywhere. Being reassured, the Prophet decided to return to Medina, stopping only for a few days to conclude peace treaties with some of the tribes on the border. There was no fighting. Delegations now poured in from all parts of Arabia offering submission and announcing acceptance of Islam.

Pilgrimage to Mecca

In the eleventh year of the Hijra, the Prophet decided to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. On the day of pilgrimage, there was assembled in the valley of Arafat a concourse of a hundred thousand devout pilgrims. Muhammad, the chosen of Allah; rejected by Quarish; persecuted; boycotted; hounded out of Taif; forced out of Mecca with a price of one hundred camels proclaimed for his person, dead or alive; pursued by the hatred of Quraish even in Medina; challenged by force, besieged, plotted against; faithful, loyal, steadfast, humble, obedient servant of Allah; His Messenger par excellence was now surrounded by an ocean of faithful, devoted hearts, all proclaiming the glory of Allah, celebrating His praise, affirming His Unity, supplicating Him for forgiveness, mercy, compassion; and invoking His blessings on Muhammad.

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The Prophet proceeded on his camel, Qaswa, to the Mount of Mercy, and, standing on the back of Qaswa, made his address of farewell. After the recitation of the Shahadah, he said that he did not know whether he would be able to meet them again on the occasion of the pilgrimage, and he asked them to lend an attentive ear to what he had to say. He went on to admonish them to order their lives in accordance with the commandments of God; to take particular care that no trespass was committed against any person in respect of his life, property, or honour; to treat women with due regard and consideration, fully observing their rights, which corresponded to the rights that the men had. He expressed solicitude for the welfare of the prisoners of war, some of whom they still had among them, saying that they must be accorded the same treatment as was due to the members of their families; he stressed that all human beings were equal, whatever their individual status, and that no one could claim any privilege or superiority against any other. He ended by asking them to hold fast to the Unity of God, and to the principal articles of faith. He then inquired whether he had conveyed God's message to them and had discharged his trust. There was a deafening and repeated response that he had. He asked those present to convey what he had said to those who were not present on the occasion. At the end of his address, he received the revelation: *This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you and have chosen for you Islam as your faith* (5:4). This was a clear indication that his mission having been fulfilled, he should now prepare for his return to his Lord.

It was time for prayer and the Prophet led the combined noon and afternoon Prayer services. Thereafter he again mounted Qaswa and returning to the vicinity of the Mount of Mercy, among the boulders, he stood on the back of Qaswa, facing in the direction of the Ka'aba, and raising his arms, became absorbed in entreaty and supplication in the attitude of one who, sore troubled and distressed, begged for mercy. He continued thus till sunset.

The pilgrimage over, the Prophet returned to Medina and occupied every available moment with expounding and teaching the principles of Islam and the philosopy that lay behind them, and with urging the Muslims to order their lives accordingly. One day he announced that he had received the revelation: *The help of Allah having come, and the victory, and thou having witnessed men entering the religion of Allah in large*

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groups, celebrate the praises of thy Lord, and seek His forgiveness for their frailties. Surely, He is Oft-Returning with compassion (110-2-4). Hearing this, Abu Bakr was overcome by emotion, and exclaimed: Were it possible, we would ransom thee with our fathers and our mothers and ourselves; upon which the Prophet observed: If it were permissible to love a human being with the heart's full devotion, I would have so loved Abu Bakr; but such love is only for God; and he went on to add that all doors that opened into the courtyard of the mosque should be closed, except the door of Abu Bakr.

Soon the Prophet fell ill. For some days, despite his illness, he continued to lead the Prayers, but when he became too weak to do so, he directed that Abu Bakr should lead the Prayers in his place.

The Holy Prophet passes away

The end approached. The Prophet expressed great anxiety lest after his death his followers might be tempted to have recourse to practices which might assign to him a position above that of a human being, as had been done in the case of some previous Prophets by their followers. He impressed repeatedly upon those who visited him that he was but a human being to whom God had vouchsafed revelation for the guidence of mankind. He breathed his last with the words: To the Companionship On High, to the Companionship On High.

The Prophet's death struck the Muslims as a fearful calamity, and they were crushed with grief. Umar drew his sword and said he would cut off the head of any who dared to assert that the Prophet was dead; he could not die. Abu Bakr arrived. Entering the chamber where the Prophet's body lay, he kissed it on the forehead, and said: God will not inflict two deaths upon thee. He then came out and asked Umar to desist while he addressed the people briefly. He recited from the Holy Quran: *Muhammad is but a Messenger. All Messengers have passed away before him. If then he die or be slain, will you turn back on your heels?* (3:145) He added: Hearken, he who worshipped Muhammad should know that Muhammad is dead, but he who worships God should remember that God is Ever-Living and does not die.

Thus ended a life that has stood unmatched in every respect in human history.

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> Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may ask, is there any man greater than he? (Lamartine, *History of Turkey*, p.276)

> If the object of religion be the inculcation of morals, the diminution of evil, the promotion of human happiness, the expansion of the human intellect; if the performance of good works will avail on the Great Day when mankind shall be summoned to its final reckoning, it is neither irrelevant nor unreasonable to admit that Muhammad was indeed an Apostle of God. (S. P. Scott, *History of Moorish Empire in Europe*, p.126).

Muhammad left an enduring impress upon a large mass of mankind. He indeed proved an excellent exemplar, as God had described him in the Quran (33:22). God proclaimed: *Allah sends down His blessings on the Prophet, and His angels constantly invoke blessings on him; do you, O believers, also invoke Allah's blessings on him and offer him the salutation of peace* (33:57). In obedience to this Divine command, all through the centuries, Muslims have constantly prayed for, and invoked Allah's blessings upon, the Prophet. There are, today, more than 800 million Muslims in different parts of the world, and the number is daily increasing. An average Muslim invokes God's blessings on the Prophet at least forty times during the course of each day, and many of them do it much oftener. Every time the Prophet is referred to in conversation by name or by his Prophetic office, Allah's blessings are invoked upon him and Allah's peace is called down upon him. Thus every moment of the night and day, millions of hearts supplicate the Almighty for His blessings on His Prophet. One who devoted his life so utterly to the service of God and His creatures, as did the Prophet, is deserving of the deepest gratitude on the part of the whole of mankind. By constantly invoking the blessings of God upon him, those who do so seek to repay a fraction of the great debt that humanity owes him.

His greatest follower and most devoted servant in modern times, the Promised Messiah, has summed up the proof of the truth of the Holy Prophet, and the perfection of the faith that

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he taught in two Persian verses which may be rendered as follows:

> Unlettered, yet matchless in respect of his inner learning and wisdom. What brighter proof can there be of his truth?
>
> My eye has roamed far afield and has not observed any spring purer than the faith that he inculcated.

Our last word is: All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the worlds.

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